

Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council

Strategic Plan Proposal

Introduction

In the early part of 2023, the Regional Council struck a working group to develop a process and create a strategic plan proposal for Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council. Drawing from a number of experienced members in Regional Council, the VisionAction Team was created. The lack of diversity on the VisionAction Team was pointed out and the team immediately put out a call to the Regional Council for two new members from diverse backgrounds to join. Two people stepped forward, and the VisionAction Team has noted a need for even greater intentionality in this area of concern for the next round of strategic planning.

The “VisionAction” Team name was chosen because of its bilingual application, and for the image of the work of the group discerning a vision forward and then proposing the focus actions that would be the “next steps” in the process of creating our own strategic plan for the Regional Council. VisionAction chose to use the General Council’s schema of the fish in order to better focus a direction for Nakonha:ka’s own strategic plan, as well as to try and have some harmonization of the strategic plan of the General Council and that of Nakonha:ka. The strategic plan proposed here is specifically for application to the Regional Council, its work and its ministries. Should any Communities of Faith or Ministries wish to use this as a resource for their own strategic planning, we would be pleased to offer this resource for your consideration. The VisionAction Team includes: Helen Hliaras-Chair; Peter Bisset; Jim Fyles; Barbara Bryce; Linda Buchanan; Lisa Byer-de Wever; Cathy Hamilton; Marc Grenon; Malekesa Oboo; Royal Orr; Rick Sheffer; Renate Sutherland; Éric Hébert-Daly-Executive Minister; Judy Coffin-Communications; David-Roger Gagnon-Networks & Clusters.

The Process

The emerging strategic plan team which would lead this process laid the groundwork and explained the idea of the strategic plan for the Regional Council at the March Regional Council meeting. The VisionAction Team then set up an initial consultation at the June Regional Council meeting, and from the information gathered in those group discussions, developed an initial framework for a series of public consultations through the late Summer and Fall. Specific target groups were identified in order to insure the inclusion of as broad a sample of the Regional Council’s population as possible. These public consultations were advertised in the Nakonha:ka bi-weekly newsletter, through general e-mail invitations, and through individual e-mail invitations to individuals, groups, community ministries, community partners and others who might be interested in taking part in the conversations. The Animation Team who facilitated these on-line and in-person consultations included: Helen Hliaras; Cathy Hamilton; Marc Grenon; and David-Roger Gagnon. Maureen Scott Kabwe and Lisa Byer-de Wever were also invited to help with the consultations at Kanasetà:ke and Kahnawà:ke respectively, and Shanna Bernier and the First-Third Ministry Leadership Team was consulted on best ways to consult with the First-Third population of the Regional Council.

A 3-page preparatory document was created and offered prior to each consultation to all those who expressed an interest in taking part in one of the consultations, as well as being made available to the wider Regional Council membership through the Nakonha:ka Newsletter, and a PowerPoint presentation was created

In all, 10 public consultations were held, which included:

- 2 & 3 June – Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council meeting
- 24 July – *Students in Theology; Students in Supervised Ministry Education (on-line)*
- 18 September – *Community Ministries and Community Partners (on-line)*
- 20 September – *Leadership Teams and Leadership Circles (on-line)*
- 27 septembre – *Les Ministères en français (on-line)*
- 3 October – *Ministries of Greater Montréal - urban & suburban contexts (on-site)*
- 5 October – *Inter-cultural Communities of Faith and Ministries (on-site)*
- 12 October – *Smaller Town and Rural Context Communities of Faith and Ministries (on-line)*
- 7 November – *Kahnawake United Church Community of Faith (on-line)*
- 19 November – *First-Third Ministries Youth Participants in Rosemère (on-site)*

Members of the Regional Council's Ministries and Communities of Faith were also invited to submit any written offerings in response to the working paper that served as a preparatory document for the consultations.

VisionAction would like to thank all those who took part in the various consultations, and for your wonderfully generous feedback which has helped this team to better shape its work. Thank you also to the Communities of Faith who kindly hosted some of the in-person consultations in their spaces.

The quality of the sharing in each of the consultations was very high, with excellent insights and suggestions offered by the many whose voices were part of the conversations. Each consultation was smaller in size (between 5 and 10 people), and the largest attended was an in-person event at 15 attendees. In all, 22 pages of notes were taken from across all of the consultations in this process. The VisionAction Team would welcome feedback on how better to promote these sessions in a future strategic plan development process in order to hear more voices in the wider conversation.

Written submissions were solicited via social media and the newsletter several times, but no written submissions to respond to the working document were offered to VisionAction Team.

The VisionAction Team is aware that even more intentional efforts are needed in the future to find the best ways to consult more widely with First-Third Ministries, Indigenous Ministries, and with some of our community partners who were not able to take part in a consultation.

Theological Grounding

We ground all of this work in two passages from Scriptures, and one sharing from one of the VisionAction Team members.

In **Genesis 18: 2,3-19**; we read; *"God said to Abraham; "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Me? Have a baby? An old woman like me?' Is anything too hard for God?"*. This whole story of Sarah and Abraham being told that they will have a child sits in the ridiculous, the out-landish, the impossible. And, yet, we know that even when things seem to be inconceivable to us, God's purview is different, and God sees the possible even when we see what looks like a dead-end. Despite what could be an over-whelming feeling of decline, God reminds us that there is still much "possible" in what to us seems "impossible". The VisionAction Team has found encouragement in this passage in looking for the "possible" hiding just around the corner ahead of us.

In **John 6: 5-13**, we are reminded of the story of the feeding of the 5 thousand, and especially of the little boy who unselfishly comes forward with all he has to try and make a difference. "Andrew, Simon Peter's

Brother, said to (Jesus): *“There is a boy here with five loaves of bread and two fish. But what is that to feed such a large number of people?”* This little boy becomes prophetic, not only in his own time, but in our time. He steps forward ready and willing to share what he has, which, on the surface seems inadequate, but in reality, is all that is needed. The VisionAction Team has grounded its work in the belief and understanding that, despite appearances, we have the loaves and fishes we need to be able to make a difference in the world through our Regional Council’s ministries and communities of faith.

Rooted in both these passages, the VisionAction Team remains convinced that God still has great things in mind for us in Nakonha:ka, and we seek to step faithfully into God’s “possible”, walking by and in faith, and not by sight, as Paul reminds us. Really, *is anything too hard for God?*

In also referencing Paul, Royal Orr, VisionAction team member, reminds us what Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians when he writes: *“Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness.” (2 Cor. 3: 12).* In his reflection *“We have Such a Hope”*, Royal reminds us that, at its origin, the word “hope” in Paul’s text in Greek (elpis) takes on more the meaning of a “Confident Hope”, and the Greek word for “faith” (pistis) has the flavor of one who is “persuaded” or “convinced” in believing what we believe. As Royal says, “I’m persuaded or convinced that there is a God and that the Universe and God work in a certain way – I have faith and so I have a confident expectation of what will happen - I have hope.” It is this confidently expectant hope that has guided the discernment of the VisionAction Team to present this proposal to you.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, the priorities of Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council are expressed in the following activity streams:

1. Build and strengthen relationships between Regional Council and communities of faith
2. Establish a rural forum
3. Create at least 7 new communities of faith
4. Implement a targeted communication plan
5. Expand the regional justice network
6. Explore options to stabilize core funding for UCC community-based ministries
7. Equip lay and ordered leaders to create spaces of intersection encouraging hope between communities of faith and local communities
8. Invigorate worship
9. Support further development of a comprehensive plan for First-Third Ministries
10. Strengthen the regional environment network
11. Facilitate involvement of UCC churches in climate emergency response
12. Explore alternate structures for the Regional Council Executive
13. Align financial decisions with activity streams of Strategic Plan

GROWTH - RENEWAL



What we heard:

We heard you say that the United Church of Canada is a far too well-kept secret; that there are some concerns about trying to grow while there is a perception of some decline at the same time; a church that builds inclusive relationships in diversity; we create space for community to “be”; that we have a progressive theology that still has something to offer; as a church- to stand in solidarity with 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples; we try to live into Right Relations and could work towards sharing what we have learned on that journey with others; that we stand up for social justice issues; that we still have a role to play in our society. We heard a clear need to re-connect the urban and suburban communities of faith and ministries with the rural and smaller-context communities of faith and ministries.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

There is a sense that God is not finished with our church. We can be a constructive, inclusive and accepting voice which can respond in unique ways to many of the needs of our society today and in the future. We believe our regional council is being called to ground ourselves in our creativity to try new forms of ministry while renewing our existent communities of faith, refreshing our ways of doing things, and reinvigorating our worship. We believe we are being called to reconnect our communities of faith and ministries to be more supportive across the urban-rural differential. We believe our voice still matters!

Activity Streams

1) Build and strengthen relationships between Regional Council and communities of faith

Establish teams to build relationships and provide support to each community of faith. Based on Jesus sending out disciples two by two (Luke 9: 1-6), teams will visit to share food, worship, listen and learn about the ministries and challenges of the community. The teams will be equipped to accompany the communities, enabling honest discussion and sharing news of best practices. The regional council may also provide support for a graceful decline if that is the situation.

January -March 2024: Create the framework, establish and equip 6 teams of two, fill a “picnic basket” with tools for invitation, welcome, and hospitality. Prepare tool for recording findings and needs of the communities of faith.

April-Oct 2024: Celebrate, share a meal and have conversation with 33% of the Communities of faith. (32 of 98 preaching places)

Nov 2024: Review program and renew tools as necessary

June 2025: Have celebrated, shared a meal and had conversation with 66% of the Communities of faith. (65 of 98 preaching places)

The remaining 33% of communities of faith involved as needed

This activity stream also supports the Invitation and Leadership initiatives.

2) Establish a Rural Forum

Connect rural communities of faith in a network for mutual support and support of rural issues.

April – October 2024: As visits are conducted (Activity stream 1) particular focus will be paid to the needs of rural communities of faith, learning about rural challenges, particular issues (e.g. climate, poverty, access to social services, etc.) and resources that already exist.

April 2024 – January 2025: Establish connections among rural communities of faith (e.g. national, regional rural networks, partnering with urban ministries, etc.) and other connections and resources that may meet stated needs.

GROWTH - CREATE

What we heard:

We have heard you say that there is much un-tapped potential for the United Church in populations served by our regional council; that we need to go back out onto the streets and reconnect with the wider community; that we are needing to better respond to the francophone populations within Québec and better understand these populations; responding to the needs of diasporic communities that are seeking a faith community; that we need to expand our thinking towards inter-denominational and inter-faith collaboration; that we could benefit from an honest assessment of how truly welcoming are communities of faith are, and how we can become even more so; that we continue to build upon our relationships with the West Island LGBTQ2+ Center, Rainbow Railroad, and other Rainbow Family partners. We have also heard the expressed desire to meet young people in the activism and causes in which they are already involved and support them in this work.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe that building community is fundamental to addressing growing issues of isolation. We believe that our inclusive justice-oriented perspective allows us to stand in solidarity and build community, and we feel called to do so even more boldly; we believe we are called to stand in solidarity with newcomer populations who are making their homes here and seeking spiritual support; we feel called to support new communities of faith and new ministries as they build their relationship with the United Church; we also believe we are called to step foot outside our buildings and be a presence, a witness and active participant in the wider community.

Activity Stream

3) Create at least 7 new communities of faith

Communities of faith may be co-located with existing ministries or independently situated, and at least two will be specifically justice-based ministries around themes such as ecological care or LGBTQ refugees. There are also opportunities with diasporic communities searching for belonging, student communities and “young retirees” around the province. There will be a particular focus on French-language ministry. The Regional Council will provide support with start-up and help to build bridges to the broader church.

January 2024 – March 2024 – Establish a growth advisory group (liaison) to help navigate the barriers and opportunities for new ministries. This group can advise the Executive, accompany new communities as they are navigating the United Church’s structure, oversee research and apply learnings and best practices (*growth animator - staff*)

December 2023 – December 2025 At least seven new communities of faith active and recognized by the Regional Council.

GROWTH - INVITE

What we heard:

We have heard you say that we need to rediscover our outreach abilities and move out into the community; that we need to find new ways to help people in Québec know that we are here and about values we support; that we need to go to populations who are already “in the community” doing work kindred with our core values; that we need to speak more loudly our particular message of love and inclusive theology which offers another perspective; that we need to rediscover who our neighbours are and reach out to them; that we can speak of Christ and spirituality but in our own unique and inclusive/expansive way. We also heard a call for a renewal of our worship and liturgical practices.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe God is calling us to share more enthusiastically who we are as a church; we believe we can be a source of spiritual support for the many who are seeking some kind of spiritual grounding, but have either had no previous experience of church, or have been harmed by their previous experience; that God calls us to give voice to our Social Justice vocation, and to stand boldly with those who are marginalized, disenfranchised or discounted.

Activity Streams

4) Implement a targeted communication plan

Tell people the Good News of Christ, as interpreted by the United Church in language that connects with their expressed needs, using both “earned media” (media coverage: reporting on UCC ministry in the Nakhonha:ka region) and paid advertising.

Nov 2023: Earned media strategy adopted by Regional Council

Dec 2023: Develop process for generation of press releases in reaction to news in a timely fashion

Nov 2023-Dec 2025: Create and distribute news release to appropriate media for each regional event that occurs (e.g. Youth Forum, Regional Council meetings) and consider an event of “public witness” so that we are not just meeting behind closed doors.

April 2024: Draft models of communication materials tested with diverse focus groups

April 2024- October 2024 Gather ministry strengths of particular communities of faith (*see activity stream 1 above*)

April- Dec 2024: 15 earned media stories generated by the Regional Council especially with regard to anti homophobia/transphobia and anti-racism.

January – April 2025 paid advertising campaign in targeted markets, pointing to the ministry strengths identified. (Financial considerations as well and template resources for local media, as well as regional, will need to be considered.)

This activity also supports the Growth initiative above.

JUSTICE



What we heard:

We have heard you say that Justice (Social, Climate, Relational) is at the core of who we are as a church; that we take stands on issues where other churches cannot yet or do not; that justice is not only an external (societal) focus, but an internal (institutional) focus; that we do not have to do the justice work alone, but rather, can do so in an oecumenical and inter-faith way, and with community partners.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

Some of our communities of faith and ministries are already on the front lines of justice work. We believe that God is calling us to renew our commitment to standing boldly in justice causes and ministries; that God is calling us to expand our just-hospitality and welcome; to amplify voices of those who have been muted; to connect with and/or create spaces where like-minded justice workers can come together to unite efforts, acting based on our unique faith-based perspective without duplicating efforts.

Activity Streams

5) Expand the regional justice network

Identify and equip “justice disciples” across the region who will be point people for advocacy resources and who witness to local efforts and effects.

January - March 2024: Develop a framework and a plan for the expansion of the Justice and Community Ministries Leadership Team.

April - October 2024: Recruit justice disciples from at least 20% of communities of faith, consult with them about focus and resources.

October – December 2024: Mobilize the justice network around a particular issue.

January 2025: Review and celebrate results of first mobilization.

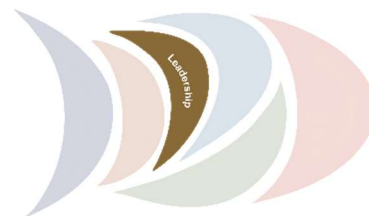
Possible areas of expansion for this activity stream could include the following:

Identify opportunities for involvement ranging from day visits to participation in justice campaigns to mentorships in local programs for individuals and groups, with particular focus on younger people.

6) Develop options for stabilizing multi-year core funding of UCC community-based ministries

October 2024: A formal proposal will be created based on discussion between Regional Council and its Executive, and Finance & Extension, to explore options.

LEADERSHIP



What we heard:

We have heard you say that the Regional Council has an important Role to play in the on-going development of our leaders; that we need to create opportunities for learning and sharing of best practices; that we need to increase support for those providing leadership by offering regular events that help people expand their leadership capacities; that we need to empower our leaders to help people reconnect with their own spiritual practices; that we need to develop resources to support leaders in a changing social and ecclesial context.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe that God is calling us to recommit to on-going support and development of our leadership; that we are being called to widen the circle and expand the diversity of people in leadership; that God is calling the ministry of ALL people to play a role in the ministry and life of the church; that we are called to create opportunities and vehicles where leaders can share best practices, learn from each other, support each other, and mentor new leaders.

Activity Streams

7) Equip lay and ordered leaders to create spaces of intersection encouraging hope between communities of faith and local communities

Identify or create resources to equip leaders in community building, using faith filled invitational language, true welcome, and creating space for difficult conversations among other topics.

January – June 2024: Identify discipleship resources that exist, adapt or create new.

September 2024: Host retreat for ministry personnel with learning component

November 2024: Host learning event for members of the Regional Council (at RC meeting)

April 2025: Based on visits (Activity stream 1) establish learning events for lay and ordered leaders

8) Invigorate Worship

Refresh worship by creating showcases in which participants share creative worship elements taking into consideration different learning styles.

May 2024: Hold a Deep Spirituality Showcase with examples of scripture liturgy and prayer with a minimum of 75 participants from at least 20 communities of faith.

Sept 2024: Host “Then, Let Us Sing!” / “Ensemble, chantons!” workshops highlighting music with focus on those with limited music resources, with a minimum of 50 participants from 15 communities of faith. *Note: French-language resources are important to our regional council and any use of them by us benefits other francophone communities in other parts of the Church.*

9) Support further development of a comprehensive plan for First-Third Ministries

Support the further development of the Leadership Team of First-Third Ministries within the Regional Council.

March 2024: Name members of a Team comprised of First-Third Ministry participants, the Minister Responsible, and other resource people, that will help develop a Regional Council-wide comprehensive plan for First-Third Ministries.

June 2024: Establishing a comprehensive plan for First-Third Ministries for adoption at the Regional Council at the June meeting.

Note that Activity stream 1 also supports leadership

INDIGENOUS PATHWAY

What we heard:

We have heard you speak of a growing understanding of the importance of the Remit # 1 voting process; we heard you speak of a deep desire to be in Right Relationship with indigenous peoples; we did hear some need for further explanation about the Remit process; and we heard several requests for on-going opportunities to learn more about this important ministry.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe that God is calling us to stand in solidarity with Indigenous siblings as they envision the way forward for the indigenous church; we believe we are called to renew our relationships with the two Indigenous Communities of Faith that are also within the area of the Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council.

The determination of the indigenous pathway will be the work of the indigenous church itself, achieved in traditional ways. We will continue to work towards reconciliation and strong healthy relationship with the indigenous communities within the bounds of the Regional Council.

September 2023 – March 2024: Calling all pastoral charges to get them to vote on Remit 1.

CLIMATE

What we heard:

We heard you say that the climate crisis is a major issue moving forward with numerous ways in which we can be engaged; that we already have oecumenical and inter-faith partnerships with whom we are working to address climate change; that we can be an important voice linking climate and justice in our society and our world; that we need to re-ground our spirituality in the Earth and nature; that urban and rural communities of faith could collaborate greatly on this issue.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe that God is calling us to an even greater commitment to stemming the tide of climate change by using our voice as a church to speak out for the Environment and for those adversely affected by climate change; that God is calling us out of our buildings and onto the streets to work with others

already engaged in Environmental actions; that we are called to strengthen our ties with other partners and groups on this issue to amplify the voice of spiritual people concerned about the planet.

Activity Streams

10) Strengthen Environment Network, and strengthen ties to other climate justice groups

In light of the number of people available for Environmental activism within our own population, we would seek to expand the current Environment Network with representation from numerous communities of faith and ministries with an intentional effort to include communities of faith in rural and smaller contexts who are feeling the direct effects of climate change in their farming and fishing communities.

December 2023 – February 2024: Recruiting for participants
(related to Activity Stream 1)

11) Facilitate involvement of UCC churches in climate emergency response such as floods or ice storms.

Communities of faith have buildings and expertise that can be of help in sheltering those affected by climate emergencies.

January – March 2024: Contact coordinating bodies of emergency services to identify specific needs.

April – October 2024: As part of the visiting program (Activity stream 1), assess interest and record resources available

October 2024: In collaboration with other agencies, generate an operational plan and a readiness maintenance program, including upgrades as necessary

Annually - Review plan and status of facilities

COMMON GOOD

What we heard:

We heard you say that many feel as though we have some resources that are as yet un-tapped; that we need to look for ways to share our loaves and fishes more vigorously; that we need to further diversify our leadership and take measures to ensure that decisions are taken with a broad representation of the population of Regional Council; that decisions should be taken with both financial and pastoral considerations in mind; that we need to speak more the language of the Gospels. We also heard you speak about the need for further Cluster development and finding additional ways to bring communities of faith together.

What we believe God is saying to us in this time:

We believe that God is calling us to better share our loaves and fishes; to focus our pastoral, ministerial and financial energies on the priorities discerned through the strategic plan process; that we need to be creative in finding ways to support and encourage growth and new ministries.



Activity Streams

12) Revise the structure of the Regional Council Executive

Executive will be asked to explore alternate models to respond to the need for diverse voices, a succession plan, and the hope for a lighter, more nimble and responsive structure while ensuring the necessary skill set.

13) Align financial decisions with activity streams

In order to appropriately resource these activity streams, the budget and granting processes will be reviewed to align financial decisions with strategic initiatives and distribute the abundance more vigorously.

December 2023: Finalize the terms of reference for the Strategic Fund

March 2024: Explore potential amendments to Regional Council Budget and staff job descriptions to align with Strategic Plan

June 2024: Review of granting and financing processes (by GELT / FE / Property & Finance LT) to align with strategic plan

NEXT STEPS IN THIS PROCESS:

- The Strategic Plan is a living document that will be revised over time
- The Staff Team will be reviewing the Strategic Plan in December, 2023 to determine how to staff and support the proposed activity streams
- Status reports will be provided at Regional Council meetings (March, June and November)